

- Interviewee 1:* – and we went over to the store _____ myself and Claude Allen did. We met Mr. Parsons coming off of the steps as we were going up into the store at number 7. Claude said, Mr. Parsons, said, I heard they pardoned you. He said, yes, you've got them, too, boy. He said, hold'em (0:38) on. Hold on. Yeah, he said, you've got them, boy. He said, hold – hold them on.
- Interviewer:* So there wasn't very much to that Company Union, I take it? Not too many guys –
- Interviewee 1:* Oh, there wasn't nothing, only just – well, then they – you know, Roosevelt give them a right to organize, have a union, and they could have a union of their own choice. And before the men knowed anything about it, the company knows and sent around and called in men, and told them they could have a union, but they didn't – they wouldn't want to join the United Mineworkers.
- And so this same superintendent, Mr. Parsons, before this, now he appointed three men for the – for the mine committee, and I didn't know nothing about it. And went down one evening to work, and called out on this same fellow that met Mr. Parsons. He said that we're going to have a union. And I said, we are? He said, yeah, said, Mr. Parsons appointed me and old man Hennison and somebody else, I forget who the other fellow was, as a committee.
- Interviewer:* And he actually believed it?
- Interviewee 1:* Why, yeah. Yeah, he really believed it.
- Interviewer:* Well, did you tell him what he truth was, then, about what that union was?
- Interviewee 1:* Oh, yeah.
- Interviewer:* Yeah?
- Interviewee 1:* Yeah, whenever I heard that – I went to bed one night and I heard that they joined the union – or they organized, and taking a list of names, and a stepson of mine got – I got out of the bed. Me and him went down to **Price Bottom** Price Bottom and joined the union _____.
- Interviewer:* And this was in 1919? This is in 1933 you're talking about?
- Interviewee 1:* Yeah, this is 1933.

Interviewer: Yeah. Uh-huh. Well, I'm glad you saw through that company union. They were just trying to sort of dupe

Interviewee 1: Oh, they – you see, now here Don Chafin the companies paid Don Chafin so much to – give him so much a ton, they said, to keep the union out of Logan County. And he had that – the reason he had all of his forces in Logan here fighting the union man and the Blair Mountain.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. You told me that Sheriff Blankenship from Mingo County –

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: – he also got this royalty on the coal to hire deputies to fight the union.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, the company – the company sent up their men that they wanted, you see? And he sent the men back that the company sent up, and he said he wasn't hiring no murders, outlaws, and thugs. He said he was hiring the citizens of Mingo County.

Interviewer: I see. Was he friends with Chafin?

Interviewee 1: No. No, he was a friend of the union. Blankenship, he was a real friend to the union.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: And do you want to know anything else about how the man who took his place got elected?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: Vinson, a fellow named Vinson, Londo Vinson. He said now he's running against – can't remember what it was Hatfield what was it. Greenway Hatfield. He run against Greenway Hatfield for sheriff. And he said, now if you want a man to be as Blankenship was, he said, vote for Vinson. He said, Greenway Hatfield won't be that way. And they elected him on that grounds, that he'd take Blankenship's stance. And the first thing he done when he come in, they offered Blankenship – try to get Blankenship to let them put a machine gun in this – of the store building at Matewan, and Blankenship wouldn't do it. And they said that as quick as he got in as sheriff, well, one of his deputy sheriffs told me, Bill Nalin told me that he took \$15,000.00 and let them put a machine gun in that

store at Matewan.

And he went right against what he said he'd do, right against the union.

Interviewer: Well, I guess they offered him a lot of money to do it.

Interviewee 1: Oh, there ain't no doubt but what he got plenty of money.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: Now they'd take fellows in, now they'd go off and get people and bring them in on the transportation who didn't know a thing on earth about mining, never was in a mine. And they'd stay around till they get them a pretty good stake, and then leave.

Interviewer: Was mining such in those days that you could learn how to do it pretty fast? I know that now when it's mechanized, it takes a while to learn it. It's more skilled, but –

Interviewee 1: Well, no, it wasn't, just hand loading things, and _____ was just how to use a shovel and a pick. There's kind of special men that run motors and machines, you know. But anybody could shovel, that day and time, and take a breast auger and bore a hole through _____ coal.

Interviewer: And so they could bring these guys in that didn't know anything about it, and they could learn it pretty fast?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Huh.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, there was always a bunch of bosses and superintendents and things, you know, for the company.

Interviewee 2: Well, they had to be.

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah, they had to be for the company. They wouldn't have worked.

Interviewer: Do you know, to the best of your knowledge, was there ever any attempt to organize the union before 1919? Because I know there was a union up in the northern part of the state even as early as 1890s, but I don't know whether there was down here.

Interviewee 1: No, not to my knowledge, they never attempted to organize. They talked about it, but not to my knowledge, they never did attempt to organize. But they got so hard on the men that the men was getting awful tired of it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: I wish that – I got the dock slips, the last shift that the company run at number seven, and I gave them to the president of the local and told him to keep them docks, and if they found so much slate in your car, they took half of it, and so much a quarter of it. And I forget how – well, it was way up into the hundreds of dollars the last day the company run, they docked the men. And they had a board down at the dump so high, and if the car didn't tip that – if the coal didn't tip that board, dock them. And it was a pretty hard job to load a car big enough and then haul five or six miles, and a lot would settle down, you know.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. When you were working down there in Mingo, did you know any of the guys who owned the mines?

Interviewee 1: Yeah, the old man L E Armentrout was the head man of Borderland.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And the old man Shea at Chattaroy. And the superintendent, whenever I quit M&W Mine at Williamson, was a fellow by the name of Evans.

Interviewer: Yeah? How did the men like these guys? I mean, were they friendly at all, or did you get along with them? Did you ever talk to them?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We talked to them. They talked pretty good. They done everything they could whenever they hear about the union to keep your mind off it, you know.

Interviewer: So in the way of giving you favors and stuff like that?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: They didn't want you – they didn't want the union to make it. The first time ever I heard about the union here in Mingo – in Logan

County, down at the church one day. And they told me that Morgan Justice had come moved to Arkoma, and they told me Morgan was down there talking about organizing Logan. That was a – that was about – just before it was organized, you know. That was the first time I'd heard of Morgan since _____ over at Mingo.

Interviewer: But when they told you about Morgan, it wasn't – they didn't think much of that?

Interviewee 1: No. No. They didn't think nothing about it, hardly.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: But, you know, when Roosevelt come in, as President, he give them the right to organize, have them a union.

Interviewer: Were times real bad around here during the Depression? Were they any worse than they had been in the twenties?

Interviewee 1: Yeah, they was awful bad in the – in – about '29 and '30, up to '32. People – the saying is you had beans and bread one day, and the next day bread and beans, which we never starved, we never starved, but we never had plenty to eat _____ as all of us does.

They did, in the last – right in the very last, Island Creek quit charging house rent, and you could draw all you made, and then that lasted until '32. But they collected the house rent back after you – the union come around, they got enough – you'd get enough money in to they collected it all back.

Interviewer: Did you ever know – well, I guess you might not have, because you weren't living in Logan at that time, but Harry Gay, who ran a mine over here in Logan?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Yeah, I knowed of him. (12:00) He run a mine down there at Old Gay, down there just – I guess you know where it's at.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, he run the first ton of coal that was run out of Logan County. I saw that in a book, 1905.

Interviewer: I take it that he was pretty friendly with his employees.

Interviewee 1: Well, I don't know much –

- Interviewer:* Mm-no? You know, I guess the way I see it is that a lot of these owners, mine owners, if they didn't want the union to come in, they thought the best way they could keep it out would be to sort of keep doing nice things for the guys that worked in their mines, so they'd kind of get their mind off of it, or think they could do all right without it.
- Interviewee 1:* Yeah, that was the – kindly the idea they had. I was thinking about Harry Gay, but it wasn't Harry, it was Harry's wife killed herself. Harry was – well, I – Jack Dempsey used to work in the mines down there for Harry Gay.
- Interviewer:* Is that so? I didn't know that.
- Interviewee 1:* Yeah. Yeah, he worked in the mines for Harry Gay years ago, when he was a boy.
- Interviewer:* You never knew him, did you?
- Interviewee 1:* Jack Dempsey?
- Interviewer:* Yeah.
- Interviewee 1:* No, but I knowed his father. Old man High. I never did meet Jack. His father was an old fiddler.
- Interviewer:* Is that so?
- Interviewee 1:* Yeah, he carried a fiddle around. I saw him and old man Spaulding one time get together, and both of them was old time fiddlers, you know. Both played the fiddle some.
- Interviewer:* When you were out on strike, were there people writing music and songs about what was going on? Or did you have a lot of singing there in the tent colonies?
- Interviewee 1:* I wish you hadn't mentioned that. Yeah, they had a – I don't remember, but some of it, but a little of it, a song about Grover's Armentrout from the hill storm come there in the evening, grabbed his rifle, and away he runs, Marvin Lambert done the same with his hair hanging down like a yellow dog's mane, just as easy. Jim Boy is called a mighty brave man, he's got a brave body but his legs won't stand just as easy. That's all I can remember of that song. Yeah, _____
- Interviewer:* Who were the people in the song?

Interviewee 1: Huh?

Interviewer: Who were the people in the song? There were some names in the song.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, Armentrout. Old man Tom Parks is the one that composed the song. And Armentrout was the main man at Borderland, and they had a shooting match up there, and the union shot from the hill into the camp, you know. And that's the reason old man Tom composed that song. Where as Armentrout from the hill _____ storm come just as easy. Grabbed him a rifle and away he run. Marvin Lambert done the same with his hair hanging down like a yellow dog's mane. Jim Boy _____ is called a mighty brave man, but he's got a brave body, but his legs won't stand.

Interviewer: That's great.

Interviewee 1: That's all I remember of that.

Interviewer: You didn't have any other songs you could sing, do you?

Interviewee 1: No, I . . .

Interviewer: Gee, I enjoyed hearing that.

Interviewee 1: There used to be – I don't know _____ there used to be – well, this was songs that Morgan Justice would sing as he organize, "The Hard-Working Miner." Before George got killed _____ while at the tipple. And I thought, that's about all I know of that song. I wish I did know that song, and remember it. It's been so long. So I just – that's the first time I've thought of that in years.

Interviewer: And Morgan used to sing it?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. When they would organize.

Interviewer: You know, I know that song. It's only a miner works down in the mines.

Interviewee 1: Yeah. He'd be a organizer –

Interviewer: Hard-working miner.

Interviewee 1: Poor miner's gone, we'll see him no more.

Interviewer: Yeah. Oh, I wish I – I have a book at home that has a lot of the words to those songs in it. I wish I had it with me.

Interviewee 1: Yeah. But he sung that, and then George got killed while _____ at the tippie. I can't put the rest of the words together.

Interviewer: Was George someone who – was George a real person?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: And he kind of like put his name into the song?

Interviewee 1: Yeah, he said he did put his name into the song. He got killed working on the tippie, you know.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee 1: And he did put his name in the song, and it was a pretty nice song. I was telling my wife this morning, we was talking about the government taking so much taxes, and old Miss Richardson gave the name of a song ____ anybody could give the name of the – or the song, you know. And she got \$100,000.00 for giving that name and singing some of the song. And I know the song. I'll send my saddle I used to go dashing, I'll send my saddle I used to ride gay to drink and then to gambling, got shot in the bosom and dying today. And she got \$100,000.00 out of that.

Interviewer: And when did you learn that song?

Interviewee 1: That – this last one?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: Oh, when I was a kid, a small boy. My brother used to sing it all the time, pickin' at the banjo.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: I don't guess I was over five or six years old or something like that.

Interviewer: You don't play an instrument, do you?

Interviewee 1: No. No. I can't play no kind of music.

Interviewer: When you used to – when Morgan was going around and organizing, did he use songs a lot to –

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: – kind of get the message across?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah. That – the miners' song, he used that, and then George got killed at the Tipplehead, he used that. He'd really touch that's the way – this miners' song would really touch the miners' hearts, you know.

Interviewer: And then would they – when – I'm just trying to get a feel for sort of how he went about doing the organizing. Would he – when they were on the job, would they talk about it? Or did they get together afterwards and –

Interviewee 1: Well, they'd get together afterwards. Well, when they organized, it wasn't no question about it. They just organized practically all at once. And they fired them all at once. They moved them out in the tent colonies.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, they had three tent – four tent colonies. I believe they had one at Stringtown. They had one at Lick Creek and one at Goodman Hollow and one at Nolan. And all the people at Borderland and Hatfield moved to Nolan. And all the people at Chattaroy and Goodman moved to Goodman. And then above Williamson went up to Lick Creek.

Then they joined – they had organized just frankly, well, it wasn't but a month or two, they had the whole thing organized. There wasn't no coal run at all hardly in Mingo County for the first year.

Interviewer: You know, I think that the miners must have been really committed to the idea of a union to have been able to – or have been willing to go out for so long.

Interviewee 1: Oh, they was. They sure was. You take a – well, you see, I was – when I was working for the company, I was cutting coal for \$0.08 a car. And I was averaging about \$7.00 a day. That was one, two, and three days a week.

And when the union come in, I jumped from \$7.00 a day to \$11.00, and it just kept building up ever since, you know.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: They had cars there – the fellows that's loading cars now _____ they claim they're two ton cars, and they – when they went to loading by the ton, they got five ton on lots of them. And they don't like men there's two ton cars.

Interviewer: When you were working such long hours, before – say like in 1918, 1919, it seems like you wouldn't have had much time left over to spend with your family or with your friends outside of the mine.

Interviewee 1: Listen, I've come out at 8:00, 9:00 lots of mornings, and I go into the house. The mine's a cool place to work, you know. It's cooler than any air conditioned place. And I go into the house. It seemed as though the sun would burn your back. I'd be up 8:00, 9:00, the wife knows – I've eat breakfast a lot of times at 8:00 and 9:00 for the morning.

And then eat supper about 3:30, 4:00, go back in the mine, stay. But I'll tell you, the first shift ever worked at 22, I worked at – now you had to work and get paid right at the face, and I worked 14 hours, and never will forget that shift. I worked 14 hours at the face, and two weeks' payday. And I went to work on the 14th night of February 1930, and the next Saturday, that was – Saturday morning, we'd have come out. Then the next Saturday, I drew a payday. I drew \$9.80, worked 14 hours.

And I said to a fellow, I said, I went to work on the 14th night of February, 1930. He said, yes, he said, that was on Friday night, wasn't it? I said, yeah. He said, how – I said, how did you know? He said, I got married on Saturday, on the –fif –of February. Now that was how much – how long I worked, and I made \$9.00, and I drew every bit of it, to give me every bit of it, just one shift's work, \$9.80.

Interviewer: The longest shift you ever worked?

Interviewee 1: No. No. That was the first shift I ever worked at 22 _____ coal _____. The longest shift I ever worked was 28 hours.

Interviewer: Twenty-eight?

Interviewee 1: Twenty-eight, Lorado. Cut coal. Run _____ an ol' iron clad Sullivan.

Interviewer: Where were you working in – which one, in the early thirties, in '31, '32?

Interviewee 1: I was working at 22, and –

Interviewer: That was 22?

Interviewee 1: – Island Creek and 7/8.

Interviewer: When you were working over there for Island Creek, did you have much contact with the guys who owned the mines, or –

Interviewee 1: No.

Interviewer: – just the foremen there?

Interviewee 1: Section boss. Yes.

Interviewer: Section boss.

Interviewee 1: Factory section boss. Yeah. You know, there's one superintendent told his bosses to not have no – not have no dealings or no visit with this labor. The old man Ted Mooney told Albert Parsons – he was a section boss, he told me Ted Mooney told him to not have no contact no way with his men when he wasn't working.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Ted Mooney owned the mine? I'm not sure who he –

Interviewee 1: No, he was a superintendent.

Interviewer: Oh, he was a superintendent.

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. He just kind of wanted to keep that distance there between –

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, they just wanted to – well, just look up to them, that was all. They wanted to let you know they was boss. I reckon the reason Albert told me that, I learned him to help on a cutting machine, and him and me was awful close friends. And then he made mine boss papers and went to mine bossing after that, you know.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So when you were working there during the Depression, I guess you didn't – well, you know, you weren't working too many days a week, but – and the pay was real bad, so things were pretty hard.

Interviewee 1: I wish I had them – some of them statements out of the cedar chest. I don't know where they're at.

Interviewee 2: Well, I could get them, but I – if I was able. I ain't able to _____ up.

Interviewee 1: Thirty-five and \$0.40. All under \$1.00. You drew over \$1.00, you can't take it out. They kept it. You had to – well, as I said, the last of '32, they quit taking house rent. You could tell it's _____ –

Interviewee 2: And actually, how old was you when you first commenced working in mines, Daddy?

Interviewee 1: I was 16 years old.

Interviewee 2: Sixteen. And signed up for the black lung, they said he had it, but he was able to – still able to work, and him 72.

Interviewee 1: I cut coal for Island Creek Coal Company, 34 years.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: I worked on a cutting machine practically all my life. Cut into the worst _____ and worst dust – anybody that knows about the mines knows the cutting machine at that time was the worst dust there was. And I got a letter from Island Creek Coal Company this morning, that they –

Interviewee 2: Here it is.

Interviewee 1: I'll just let you read it.

Interviewee 2: Right there. They didn't know that he had ever signed up for it, but he _____ had _____ –

[Audio cuts out]

Interviewee 1: Big guns on him, got to talking _____ about what kinda _____ was, and he said, I ain't none. Why? Well, I said, where I'm from, _____ guns is the law. He said, you figure on staying here a while? I said, yeah. He said, it won't be strange to you long, then.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And it wasn't. See a boy coming and a girl together, have a big gun. They all carried .45s or .44s. They got their holsters. It's a sight to look at.

Interviewer: Gee. Well, you know, they had a lot of labor trouble there later on. They tried to organize it in the early thirties.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, they did organize it.

Interviewer: They finally got it organized, but only after they had a lot of trouble.

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: So I heard in 1931 they had a whole bunch of strikes over there, and guys all went out for union recognition, and the operators wouldn't cave in, and then the union sold them out, wouldn't send them any money. No, it was rough.

Interviewee 1: When I think about all of them, them big mines over in there is organized now, recognized the union.

Interviewer: Well, most of them. A lot of them belong to the Southern Labor Union, which is kind of like a company union, you know.

Interviewee 1: Yeah. But I don't see why that the men wouldn't join the United Mine Workers. I guess it – my hospital bill, if I hadn't have had the welfare–

[End of Audio]